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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: A/S WELCH AND PM SINIORA COORDINATE
CHAPTER VII STRATEGY

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a 5/16 meeting, PM Siniora informed the visiting NEA A/S Welch that he is ready to initiate an all-out final diplomatic push to garner support for Chapter VII to establish the Special Tribunal. Once the P-3 draft resolution text has been agreed upon, Siniora will concentrate on winning the support of South Africa and Indonesia, and will make a special effort to assure Italy that Chapter VII is needed, and needed now. Siniora, who is sending his senior advisor Mohamad Chatah and probably Acting FM Tarek Mitri to New York to engage with Security Council representatives one-on-one, will also ask his regional allies to pressure the Congo, Ghana, Peru, and Panama. He acknowledged that Russia, China, and Qatar will be difficult, but he intends to make direct appeals to those nations as well. Concerning other matters, Siniora asked for continued U.S. support for Lebanon's post-Chapter VII phase in which the next major challenge is the election of the president. Siniora believes that if Syria is successfully frustrated by the establishment of the tribunal, Syria will do everything in its power to ensure the election of another pro-Syrian president. Siniora and his close aides were clearly relieved when informed by the Assistant Secretary that although the U.S. is not in the business of selecting Lebanon's next president, it would not stand idly by and accept another pro-Syrian lackey. Finally, the Prime Minister promised that the pro-reform movement would now expeditiously address the primary concerns of the Lebanese people: economic reform, elimination of corruption, security, and political peace among all Lebanon's factions. (See para 16 for our most current information on the GOL strategy to encourage Chapter VII approval of the tribunal.) End summary.

12. (C) Prime Minister Fouad Siniora received Assistant Secretary David Welch, the Ambassador, A/S Staff Assistant

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and Embassy notetaker at the Grand Serail on May 16. Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister Mohamad Chatah, advisor Rola Nouraddine, and Lebanon's Ambassador-designate to the U.S. Antoine Chedid also attended the meeting. Toward the end of the meeting, PM Siniora received a call from the Secretary, in which he warmly thanked the Secretary and President Bush for their indispensable support to Lebanon and invited her to visit Beirut as soon as UN Security Council action on the

Special Tribunal was complete.

CHAPTER VII STRATEGY

¶3. (C) PM Siniora and A/S Welch compared notes on UNSYG Ban Ki-moon's briefing to the Security Council and agreed that it was a bravura performance that set the stage for a Chapter VII resolution. A/S Welch thanked the Prime Minister for his "excellent" letter to Ban and said our UN Ambassador was now prepared to use our influence to win as many votes as possible for Chapter VII establishment of the tribunal. Siniora assured us that his government was deeply appreciative of U.S. support and was about to launch a final, concerted push for Security Council votes.

¶4. (C) Acknowledging that the P-3 and Belgium were solid affirmative votes, Siniora said he would be traveling to Indonesia on May 24 to discuss the resolution with that nation's president. He was confident he would gain Indonesian support. Even if the tribunal vote had already occurred by then, it would be important to win Indonesia's support for future UNSC action in support of Lebanon. The Prime Minister also indicated he has influence with South Africa and would concentrate on that important Council member. Siniora took under advisement from the A/S that South Africa has recently been unexpectedly contrarian in Council deliberations, but by all means to go after their vote. Referring to his pocket tally sheet, Siniora said he expected that France should be able to convince the governments of both Ghana and the Congo.

¶5. (C) The Prime Minister was surprised that Italy was not yet in the "yes" column, but indicated he understood they wanted to carefully evaluate the risks in light of their heavy presence in the UNIFIL force in south Lebanon.

BEIRUT 00000692 002 OF 004

Although he made it clear he would personally contact the leadership of each council member, Siniora indicated that his influence with Panama and Peru was not notable. That left Russia, China and Qatar -- all difficult for various reasons, but particularly concerning veto-empowered Russia and China. A late-in-the-meeting call from the Secretary gave him increased confidence regarding Russia's intentions, but Siniora indicated he would continue to reach out to President Putin.

¶6. (C) To be ready for last-minute arm twisting, Siniora said he would send his closest advisor, former Ambassador Mohamad Chatah, back to New York to steadfastly lobby and explain Lebanon's situation to the pertinent UN representatives. He was also thinking of sending veteran diplomat Tarek Mitri, his Acting Foreign Minister, who has become an expert on the tribunal and the already-approved documents. When Siniora indicated he would also send Judge Ralf Riachi, one of his judges who had been working with OLA Chief Nicolas Michel over the past few months, Ambassador Chatah interjected that the French had just asked them to refrain from actively proposing legal changes at this time, to minimize complications with the proposed resolution text. Siniora agreed with this recommendation and said he would send his legal expert to New York, but to remain in the background until his expertise was needed.

¶7. (C) Like his March 14th colleagues who met with A/S Welch the night before at Walid Jumblatt's dinner (septel), the Prime Minister was clearly energized by the fact that the tribunal finish line was now within sight. Although it was the non-negotiable centerpiece of GOL's overall strategy to keep Syria out of Lebanon, Siniora realized the patience of the Lebanese people was wearing thin and the pro-reform movement had to move forward to offer Lebanon a clear vision of its democratic future.

NEXT STEPS

¶18. (C) Once the tribunal is established, Siniora said his government, along with its international supporters, had to focus on the critical presidential election, scheduled to be decided in a special session of parliament in late September.

If Syria suffers a defeat with the tribunal, Siniora believes Bashar al-Asad will spare no effort to continue Syrian control of Baabda palace. He stated his belief that the Syrians, however, have underestimated not only Lebanon's democratic tradition, but the basic common sense of the Lebanese people as well. He reminded his guests that Lebanon is the only Arab country that has living former presidents and is a country that is proud of its record of leadership change through elections vice hereditary succession or coup d'etat.

¶19. (C) Siniora proposed to engage the Lebanese people -- and confound the opposition -- by promulgating a clear statement of democratic objectives that when achieved, would create a stable, pluralistic, democratic, prosperous country at peace with its neighbors. He conceded that far too much time and effort had been expended on the tribunal and that expenditure of energy had nearly exhausted the Lebanese people. He understood the complaints that, at times, it merely looked like the tribunal was the only concern of the Siniora government. To combat this understandable, but incorrect perception, and to politically disarm the powerful opposition, Siniora suggested that a statement of democratic principles put forth by March 14th, and supported by the Patriarch and the international community, could be used to define what a president of Lebanon should be -- and by extension, peel away support from candidates who were essentially little more than Syrian agents.

¶10. (C) Alluding to the painfully ambitious leader of FPM, Siniora said that even Michel Aoun was beginning to realize that his drive to the presidency was faltering. Chatah referred to independent polling that showed Aoun's popularity has fallen below 30 percent, barely half the support he enjoyed when the former general returned from exile in mid-2005. Now that successful resolution of the tribunal issue was within hailing distance, Siniora believed the intrinsic appeal of the pro-reform message has a real chance to succeed, with the result being a president representative of all of Lebanon's communities.

BEIRUT 00000692 003 OF 004

¶11. (C) A/S Welch stated his support for this approach and reiterated that even though the U.S. would not recommend specific candidates, he stated that he had made it clear in each of his on-going meetings that neither would the U.S. stand quietly aside if a Lahoud clone, subservient to either Damascus or Hassan Nasrallah, claimed the presidency. If that unfavorable development occurred, the U.S./Lebanese relationship would suffer accordingly. The Prime Minister received this news, and the fact that it was being broadly shared with all factions, including Aoun, with undisguised enthusiasm.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

¶12. (C) When it became clear by their inquiries that the Prime Minister and his team were concerned whether the discussions at Sharm el-Sheikh or other venues could impact Lebanon's sovereignty, the A/S stated unequivocally that the U.S. would not use Lebanon as a "bargaining chip" with either Syria or Iran. The discussions in Sharm el-Sheikh and the planned meetings with Iranian representatives in Baghdad were bore-sighted on Iraq and its stability. He conveyed to Siniora his impression that Syrian FM Walid Moallem came away from Sharm el-Sheikh disappointed and perplexed, because he had apparently come to the summit with the misperception that the stated focus on Iraq security was merely a cover for a

broader agenda. Likewise with Iran, he explained how their Foreign Minister was unable to expand the discussions beyond the stated purpose of the meeting. A/S Welch re-emphasized that the Syrian regime could expect little dialogue from the U.S. unless it changed its behavior -- principally toward Iraq, but Lebanon as well.

¶13. (C) Siniora indicated his strong approval for this approach, not only because it would erode some of the inexplicable confidence of Syria, but it would also give pause to some of the more aggressive pro-Syrian sympathizers in Lebanon itself, especially Michel Aoun. Siniora said that Lebanon very much wished to build good relations with Syria, but only if Lebanon's sovereignty was fully respected.

¶14. (C) As he has in nearly every meeting since last summer's conflict, Siniora asked about progress on Shebaa Farms. A/S Welch advised the Prime Minister to be careful not to make a territorial issue the centerpiece of his position on UNSCR 1701, since that would only give Hizballah, Iran, and Syria a cause celebre. He advised Siniora it would be far more effective, and more likely to succeed, if the Prime Minister use the upcoming UNSCR 1701 progress report to re-energize his government's 7 points plan. By keeping the focus on a comprehensive resolution of Lebanon's challenges, using not only the 7 points, but also UNSCR 1701, a democratic GOL was far more likely to achieve success without having to share credit with Hizballah. A/S Welch said by adhering closely to Lebanon's constitution, 1701 and the 7 points, Siniora could make it untenable for Aoun, and like-minded opposition members, to remain in their ill-conceived alliance with Hizballah. He urged the Prime Minister not to let himself get bogged down in the single-issue trap of Shebaa, to the benefit of the so-called "resistance."

BORDER SECURITY

¶15. (C) The meeting concluded with a review of border security in which Siniora expressed his full support of an impending UN border assessment, but cautioned that according to his understanding the assessment was scheduled to take 2-3 months and would not provide an immediate solution to an acknowledged problem. Siniora emphasized, however, that the German-led Northern Border Pilot Project was proceeding well and was a constant item on his daily agenda, implying he was directing his security services to comprehensively support the effort. A/S Welch said quicker and more comprehensive action was not only needed, but required by the articles of UNSCR 1701. He cautioned the Prime Minister that illicit movement of weaponry across the border could quickly undo all the progress Siniora and his government had achieved. Siniora indicated he well understood the situation and the risks.

BEIRUT 00000692 004 OF 004

UPDATE ON CHAPTER VII STRATEGY

¶16. (C) Subsequent to A/S Welch's meeting with Siniora, the GOL strategy for pushing for Chapter VII approval of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon came together in more detail, including the following elements:

- PM Siniora briefed UNSC ambassadors and charges on 5/16 (to be reported septel).
- Mohamad Chatah and Judges Chucri Sadr and Ralf Riachi will leave for New York on Friday, 5/18. Sadr and Riachi will not be there to negotiate the text but to explain the finer points of Lebanese law, should UNSC members have questions.
- Based on "intelligence" from Chatah and others in New York, PM Siniora will start lobbying non-permanent UNSC members by telephone. Siniora will only begin once a draft

UNSC is circulating, so that he will push for approval of something specific.

-- Acting Foreign Minister Tariq Mitri and UN PermRep-Designate Nawaf Salam will arrive in New York by the middle of next week to participate in the UNSC discussions.

¶17. (U) A/S Welch departed post before clearing this cable.
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